

Dartmoor's Jewel

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Renaud Recamier sat with his back against the rough granite wall. He knew that there was no shelter from the icy wind and the rain that was falling steadily. Renaud couldn't believe that it was only the beginning of October. In Paris there would have been blue skies and golden light, but here a thick grey mist blotted out any sunlight. It wouldn't have made any difference if he had caused a misdemeanour and been locked up in the tiny windowless building known as the Cachot. It was three hours after sunrise when all the prisoners were turned out of their hammocks to be counted, and the sun still hadn't made an appearance.

He'd preferred being imprisoned on the 'Genereux', a hulk*, moored off Plymouth. At least there they'd had the scent of the sea to perfume their days, but at the Dartmoor War Prison all they could smell was damp mingled with the stench from the slaughterhouse. Even on the 24th of May when he'd arrived with the first draft of 2,500 of Napoleon's loyal men, the newly built prison was wet and had smelt mouldy. The 18-mile march had been too much for some of his fellow inmates and they'd been buried in shallow unmarked graves. 1809 had

been a bad year for so many of the brave men he'd fought with. It was a hard life for the five hundred troops who were stationed there to guard them. From what he could gather their eleven blocks of barracks were as cold and inhospitable as the prison itself.

Renaud realised he was lucky by comparison. He at least was one of Les Lords, from a well to do family who sent him letters of credit, but he preferred to spend his time with Les Laborieux, the industrious men who made ships, ornaments and trinkets, carved from bone. These they sold to local gentry at the prison market. Renaud was thankful that he wasn't one of Les Minaibles, the gamblers, or worse still Les Romains, those men who gambled and were even prepared to bet their clothes. Renaud's family were goldsmiths who lived and worked in the Marais in Paris. He had been trained as a maker of jewellery before the desire for adventure had overwhelmed him and he'd joined Napoleon's navy.

He straightened his shoulders and forced himself to smile. The first of the buyers were arriving and he was determined to get the very best price for the bone ship and miniature guillotine

*Hulk = prison ship. The Genereux was one such ship. It was a 64-gun ship captured by Rear Admiral Lord Nelson in the Mediterranean on the 18th of February 1800. In October 1805 it housed 750 French prisoners of war.